

THE OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS CONFERENCE REPORT
Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I oppose the passage of the Omnibus Appropriations Conference Report.

The bill before us was written in a process that is the legislative equivalent of painting a room in the dark. You don't know exactly how the room will look until you turn on the lights, but you can be sure that it will be a mess. And of course that is what has happened. This bill is a mess.

The Republican leadership has taken nine spending bills, funding 13 government agencies with more than \$388 billion, and combined them into a single bill that is more than 3,000 pages long. On top of all that spending, they have included several riders that make unrelated changes in federal law. Most of these bills were never debated or amended by the full Senate. Many of the provisions haven't even had a committee hearing. The only people who have had a chance to review and amend the bill are the Republican leadership and the White House, and all of that went on behind closed doors. And the public, the press and almost every member of Congress has had no real opportunity to review them before we vote and send them to the president to become law.

So it comes as no surprise that this massive spending bill, created by a terribly flawed process, is itself terribly flawed.

The Republican majority and the Bush Administration have provided inadequate investments in education, housing, small business and a number of other important domestic priorities.

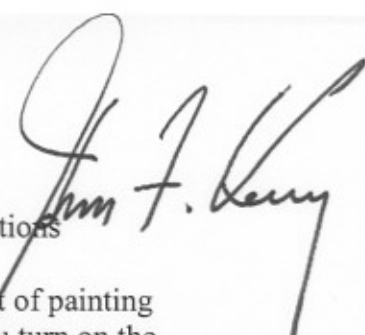
The Community Oriented Policing Systems program, called the COPS program, has been eviscerated, and funding for the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant program has been cut. Both of these programs help our cities and towns fight crime and protect our citizens but putting well-trained and well-equipped cops on the street. And both programs had played an increasingly important role in homeland security.

The bill does not keep our promise to care for our veterans. The funding level included in the Conference Report for Veteran's healthcare, while above last year's level, is insufficient to meet the needs of our veterans. Today, 500,000 veterans are prevented from receiving health care through the Veterans Administration. New veterans are fighting to obtain the services they have earned. Thousands more are waiting for disability ratings. The Congress had an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of those who have given so much for this country, and the Congress failed.

The bill harms small businesses by failing to provide access to the capital they need for investment and growth. As the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I know how critical small business loans are to expanding economic opportunity, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the bill eliminates all funding and increases fees for the program at the Small Business Administration that is the largest source of small business loans in the nation.

Mr. President, I will not try to list all the worthwhile programs that have been cut or eliminated, because the list is just too long. The point is simple: dozens of federal investments that help our cities and towns, our schools, our small businesses, our police, our environment and much more have been needlessly cut. And those cuts will do needless harm to communities and families all across the country.

And along with the spending provisions of the bill, the White House and the Republican leadership have attached riders that make changes in federal law. These are



provisions that have not been considered by the House or Senate, and in many cases have not received a committee hearing or markup.

The bill includes a provision that will prevent federal, state and local governments from requiring any institutional or individual health care provider to provide, pay for, or refer for abortion services. Ten of my female colleagues, including two Republicans, have expressed their strong opposition to that provision and affect it may have on reproductive health services. In a letter to the Appropriations Committee, they point out that the provision has never been considered and never had a hearing in the Senate. It comes down to this: whether you support or oppose this provision, and I oppose it, this is no way to do the people's work. Whatever you think of this provision, it does not belong in a three-thousand-page bill spending bill. It deserves a hearing, a debate and vote.

Another provision that was included with no vote, hearing or discussion by the Senate would allow Congressional staff access to the tax returns of individuals and businesses. There is absolutely no justification for such a provision in this bill or anywhere else. It is a shocking abuse of power by the Republicans. This provision, which would allow congressional staff to review any private citizen's tax return, is unacceptable. It tramples the rights of our citizens and grossly violates the public trust. I am pleased to hear the assurances of the Majority Leader that this provision will be removed from the bill. However, we need to understand how it came to be included in the Conference Report. Who in the Congress sponsored this provision? Who in the White House approved it, since we know the White House has blessed this bill?

Mr. President, is there any good in this bill? Of course there are many worthwhile federal programs that are funded. Like a broken clock is right twice a day, a bill spending \$388 billion will get a few things right.

I am pleased that the Conference Report includes \$62 million for the YouthBuild program, which is a highly effective comprehensive program that helps at-risk youth obtain an education and take responsibility for their lives and their communities. YouthBuild is the only national program that provides young adults an immediately productive role in the community while also providing equal measures of basic education toward a diploma, skills training toward a decent paying job, leadership development toward civic engagement, adult mentorship toward overcoming personal problems, and participation in a supportive mini-community with a positive set of values.

And there are other good programs this bill has funded adequately. I am grateful for the good that will come from this legislation, including funding for federal projects and programs in Massachusetts.

On a whole, the bad outweighs the good in this bill, and I will vote against it.